

***Lasius brunneus* (Latr.) (Hymenoptera: Formicidae): house ant, hero and coward.**—R. A. Jones (2003) recounts his surprise at being sent workers of *Lasius brunneus* (Latreille), so typically of a timid and retiring nature, which had been infesting a biscuit tin within a house, speculating that the ants may have been nesting within old timbers there.

In fact a number of accounts exist of similar behaviour by the species in this country, among the earliest published being those of Kane and Tyler (1958). In one of their cases, the ants were invading a canteen and seemed to originate from a wild population in an adjacent wooded area. In another case concerning a domestic infestation, although workers were present outside on nearby garden trees, alates swarmed from behind skirting boards inside the building, suggesting a nest there.

Two similar cases were reported to me, with voucher specimens, in the 1990s from Hertfordshire, where the species is quite common across the southern half of the county. In one, workers numbering in dozens daily had been seen in the wood-lined cloakroom and kitchen of a timber house in Berkhamsted. The occupant, local naturalist Enid Evans, stated that the ants ignored any food fragments and seemed quite aimless in their wanderings. There was no visible evidence of occurrence or entry from outside. She could not say whether any decay or damp occurred within the structural timbers of her house which may have provided a nest site, but it is likely this was the case. The ants' food source remained a mystery.

In the second case, again reported by a naturalist occupant (Colin Everett) in a 19th Century house at Garston, it seemed more likely that the ants were opportunistic entrants originating from wild populations which had been observed among trees within 50 metres of the house. There was no evidence suggestive of internal nesting. Workers were first seen on the outside walls and then at various places within the house. Despite control measures having been taken, ants were still being seen around food cupboards several years later.

If this domesticated side to the character of *L. brunneus* is seen as somewhat counter to its normally well-deserved reputation for extreme timidity (rapidly fleeing upon the slightest disturbance), a recent observation (Attewell, 2003) was, to me at least, much more surprising. If anything, it showed that it can sometimes be quite courageous, or at the very least, indifferent to danger. During an attempt in 2002 to photograph workers of *L. brunneus* tending aphids on the undersides of Dogwood leaves in a hedgerow near Radlett, Herts., the inevitable movements resulting from handling the leaves caused the ants to be disturbed. Instead of immediately quitting the scene in fear of their lives as I would have expected, however, these ants either remained calmly with their aphid charges, or else walked nonchalantly onto my hands with mandibles just slightly ajar, almost as if more from curiosity than anything else!—P. J. ATTEWELL, 69 Thornbury Gardens, Boreham Wood, Herts., WD6 1RD.

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